Navigating Repercussion of Societal Pressures On Emotional Volatility Through Mental Toughness Among Generation Z

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ABSTRACT

The emotional well-being and relationship success of Gen Z may depend on the quality of their attachments, which are shaped by social experiences. The aim of this research is to examine the relationship between societal expectations, mental toughness and emotional volatility in Gen-Z. Correlational research design was used and purposive sampling strategy was implied to collect data from representative sample of Gen-z (males=32.0%, females=68.0%). Standardized assessment measures along with demographic Performa was used to collect data from respondents. Findings show that there exists a positive correlation between societal expectations and emotional volatility. It is worth noting that mental toughness proved to be major mediator, and it is possible to think that people high in mental strength might find it easier to address challenges that students can perform in response to societal pressures. The findings are consistent with prior literature on resilience and emotional volatility providing the contribution to the past research as they highlight the role of mental toughness to reduce negative emotional consequences. This study will be helpful in future research to further investigate these relationships within different demographic groups and other situations.

Keywords: Generation-Z, societal expectations, mental toughness, Emotional volatility.

INTRODUCTION

The perceived norms and standards of the society concerning the choices and achievements as well as the measures to be taken by the individuals are the societal expectations. Societal expectation can be described as the set of rules, norms, values, and beliefs that a society has regarding the way individuals are supposed to behave, think, and look in a certain social situation that are unspoken and are usually unwritten as well. Such expectations predetermine what is acceptable, appropriate and even desirable in a certain group, community or culture. They form our ways of communication, our self-image, and they cause the general social order (Wright, 2024).

According to Popovych, (2021) the social expectations of the person can be defined as an individual socio-psychological construct, which serves as a process of cognitively controlling behavior, a state of

mind: it has its own properties, by way of the functions and psychological mechanisms of the organism, the social expectations determine social behavior, formation of the expectations level is a significant factor in the setting of the goals, social expectations grant the individual the means to create a social reality, and determine social expectations the level of development of the society, in a crisis, stable state, or upswing. The observation of such social expectations which are present in the various levels of the population opens the prospect of predicting how the society and particular groups of the population will react to various issues the result of which will determine the effectiveness of social reforms and alterations.

Twenge et al. (2019) examined the changes in mood disorders since the middle of the 2000s through the longitudinal study on the nationally representative sample of adolescents in the United States. They found that psychological discomfort (age: 18 to 25) increased by 71 percent and depression by 63 percent in the years 2008-2017. These figures indicate the normal huge increase of anxiety and despair in a relatively short time span. The same trend can be said of college students because the number of emergency calls to university counseling has been doubled during the last five years. (Gray, 2015). Hence, this dramatic rise in the rates of anxiety and depression is a possible indication of a massive change in generations.

In order to achieve the optimal developmental outcomes, children should be provided with varying levels of protection and control at different phases within the lifespan, which range between infancy and adolescence (Santrock, 2019). Expectation States Theory of Berger et al. (2014) this sociological framework advises on the manner in which status hierarchies develop within groups because of the societal expectations concerning competence and abilities that are associated with social categories such as, gender, race and age. Even though they may not be founded upon the actual performance, such expectations may determine which individuals are perceived to be more competent and influential within a group. According to Berger and Kim et al (2019) these are some of the main features of emotional volatility, that have to deal with high-level Emotions (feeling are commonly at high intensity), quick Shifts (moods and emotions can be quick and extreme, with unexpected changes), mismatched Reactions (emotional responses do not always fit the causes both in terms of intensity), and difficulty Regulating Emotions, (people may not necessarily be able to manage or control their emotional reactions in terms of intensity), and also unpredictability (emotional levels can be unpredictable and often difficult to predict and direct). As Digital Native Theory of Lanier. (2017) stresses, Gen Z are the first people to be actually born digital natives exposed to constant presence of internet, social media, smartphones, and other digital means. This is incessant connectedness has had a dramatic influence on their thought patterns, communication methods and modes, as well as social interaction with information, but also social life. Lanier says that this continual exposure has resulted in this generation, and especially Generation Z, which processes information differently than past generations and tends to communicate very quickly and in bite-sized chunks using social media and other digital means. Such an environment breeds a special kind of the skill set where Gen Z can easily find their way in complex digital environment, but comes with drawbacks, like a short attention span, the greater levels of anxiety, and the distorted view of selfbased on online validation.

Rationale

Social expectations will affect the social behavior and the behavior of the individual, small contact group, community or mass of people. Social expectations can establish requirements, norms, sanctions, ideals that cannot be broken, should be performed by the participants of the process (Khmil & Popovych, 2019). Gen-Z is under pressure due to social media, education, and career achievements that lead to increasing pressure of lack of feelings and being able to control themselves (Seabrook et al., 2016). To have an

overview in regards to mental health in the current generation, it will be critical to see how these societal pressures affect emotional volatility. The studies show that strong people have more abilities to cope with stress and mood swings (Connor & Davidson, 2003). Exploring resilience as mediating variable is expected to determine mechanisms capable of moderating emotional volatility hence creating focused intervention development.

Emotional volatility is also being considered as another important area of mental health especially among the young adults (Gross & John, 2003). Extreme appraisals of emotional volatility may result in poor performance in different aspects of life including the relationships and academic work. It is therefore important to understand repurcussions of emotional volatility like societal pressures that can be used to develop strategies towards improving emotional well-being.

This research falls within the scope of developmental psychology and social science because there are gaps in the literature about the peculiarities of being a person of generation Z. In their discussion of such relationships, the intended research is aimed at making the requisite contributions that can enlighten parents, educators, and mental health experts on approaches that can be used in ensuring that the emotional well-being of the generation is taken care of appropriately.

Objectives

- To examine the relationship among societal expectations, mental toughness and emotional volatility of Generation Z.
- To investigate the mediating role of mental toughness between societal expectations and emotional volatility among the representatives of Generation Z.
- To find the gender difference of generation-Z with respect of societal expectations, mental toughness and emotional volatility in generation Z.

Hypotheses

- H1. There would be a significant positive relationship among societal expectations, mental toughness and emotional volatility among Generation Z.
- H2. Mental toughness would mediate the relationship between societal expectations, and emotional volatility among Generation Z.
- H3. There would be a significant gender difference of Generation-Z with respect to societal expectations, mental toughness and emotional volatility.

Method

The objective of the present research is to explore relationship among societal expectations, mental toughness and emotional volatility among Generation Z. This chapter will give an extensive report on how the present research will be designed and the different attributes and the features of the sample used thoroughly. The evaluation processes and practices have been discussed in details.

Research Design

Correlational research design was used to find out the relationship between an independent variable with the mediator, affecting the dependent variable.

A correlational research design examines the connection between variables in a manner that the researcher has no control, or manipulation over any of them. The viability and/or orientation of the connection between 2 (or more than 2) variables are captivated in correlation. The sign of a correlation might be positive or negative (Bhandari, 2023).

Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling strategy used which is also called non probability sampling technique or selective sampling. It entails participant selection. The researcher uses a sampling method where he or she takes his participants on the basis of certain characteristics or qualities which fit the research objectives. This plan usually takes place when the aim is to target the individuals who have a certain knowledge, experience, or other similar suitable characteristics accessible to the research. It enables the researchers to purposively draw a sample that is able to offer thick deep data, and as such, it makes it ideal to carry out a qualitative research (Etikan & Bala, 2017).

Sample

The requirement of sample size was calculated in G power 3.1.9.7 version using an effect size of 0.3, level of 0.5, and power of 0.95 with the 3 no of predictors. G power, most likely, estimate the sample size that involves about 115 Gen Z, and the Current research, this estimated sample size of 378 Gen-Z (male=121,female=247) is used to ensure the generalizability of the data.

A total of 385 participants were initially considered, but after applying specific inclusion and exclusion criteria, 378 were selected for the study. This non-clinical sample consisted of individuals chosen through purposive sampling, a non-probability technique where researchers select participants based on specific characteristics relevant to the research question. Before participating, all individuals provided informed consent (Nikolopoulou, 2023). Data collection occurred between March 2025 and June 2025, targeting individuals aged 18-25 from various public and private educational institutions. Both manual and virtual methods were employed to gather samples, which were then equalized based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria

- Participants were between 18 and 25 years old at the time of the study to fall within the Generation Z cohort.
- Participants were proficient in English to understand and accurately respond to the survey questions.

Exclusion criteria

- Participants who has diagnosis of severe mental health conditions, current or past experience with trauma or abuse (due to potential emotional distress).
- Participants, whom both parents passed away.

Assessment Measures

Societal Expectations Scale

Gen-Z societal expectation scale, the creation of a psychologist and writer Twenge (2020), who has written much about the issue of Gen-Z and societal expectation. It is a self-report questionnaire and can have 10 items (e.g. 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). This scale describes the pressure that the Gen z faces due to the expectation society has towards them. The increased score is indicative of the fact that Gen z experiences greater pressure in terms of societal expectations. Sample items: I feel like I need to balance my academic and social life to meet societal expectations.

The Brief Resilience Scale

Smith et al created the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) in 2008. It aims at examining the capacity to recover or bounce back to stress. BRS is a unitary construct which is reliable. It is, as expected, associated with the personal attributes, social relations, coping, and health. It is quite short self-report questionnaire and comprises 6 items (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Sample items: It is hard for me to snap back when something bad happens.

Brief Emotion Dysregulation Scale

This is a screening version of the Brief Emotion Dysregulation Scale (BEDS) in a bid to gather the overall feeling of emotion dysregulation. Trull et al in 2017 developed the BEDS as an eight-item scale that is meant to measure the experience of dysregulation of emotion and draws on the multi-component model of dysregulation of emotion (Carpenter & Trull, 2013), HE is an expert in the field of emotion dysregulation. Each of them was graded on the scale of 1 to 4 (1 = false/not true at all, 2 = slightly true, 3 = mainly true, and 4 = very true). Sample items: My moods tend to cause problems for me.

Ethical consideration

Before starting the research, following ethical considerations will be kept in mind.

- Before collecting data, permission to utilize the scales will be taken by requesting it to the authors.
- Before the starting the research, participants were briefed about the purpose and procedure of research.
- Informed consent form was taken from participants.
- The participants were briefed about the right of withdrawal.
- Anonymity and confidentiality of the participants was maintained.

Procedure

The study began once the authorization is given by Department of Psychology, Lahore Garrison University. The supervisor agreed on the topic and appropriate scales to the variables were chosen. Permission from authors of scales asked to use assessment measures. The sample gathered by using inclusion and exclusion criteria. Participants were informed clearly of the nature and process through a signed informed consent. Before collecting the data, the researcher informed the participants about the aims and methods of the study and made them understand their opportunity to withdraw, privacy, and anonymity. The survey was set up in the form of a questionnaire which lasted about 10-15 minutes. Of the 385 questionnaires retrieved, 378 passed the criteria of the research. The results analyzed and the data

has been inserted into SPSS and then analyzed. Once the data collection process is over, the respondents were thanked out of their contribution to the research. The analysis of data was carried out through the application of SPSS 22.All the data was collected by Google forms and hard copies of questionnaires in Lahore Garrison University and Girls college of Gullberg.

RESULTS

This study was aimed at examining the association between social expectations, where mediator as mental toughness and its effects on emotional volatility, were constructed among Gen Z. The research was intended to investigate the connection between these variables, and their sensitivity to determine the experiences of Gen Z. The analyses in this chapter are comprised of advanced statistical analyses, where the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) as a statistical tool was used to conduct descriptive analysis, evaluation of psychometric constructs, and correlation analysis, to conduct structural equation modeling as well as analysis of mediation effects in testing the hypotheses.

Table 1Psychometric properties of societal expectations, mental toughness and emotional volatility

Scales	K	М	SD	Range		
				Potential	Actual	Cronbach 's α
						_
Societal Expectations	10	34.54	6.53	10-50	10-50	.80
Mental Toughness	6	20.48	3.83	6-30	6-30	.74
Emotional Volatility	8	24.87	5.95	8-40	8-32	.86

Note. N=378, M=Mean, S=Standard Deviation, SE=Societal Expectations, MT=Mental Toughness, EV=Emotional Volatility.

The instruments with measuring the intended constructs. The table includes the means, standard deviations and Cronbach alpha values that showed that all scales were of good reliability. This implies that the scales used were reliable at acceptable levels and hence they can be analyzed further to an inference statistics. Reliability analysis showed good reliability in MT=.74 and very good reliability in SE=.80, EV=.86, so we can proceed further for inferential statistics.

Table 2

Intercorrelation between societal expectations, mental toughness and emotional volatility

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Societal Expectations	34.54	6.53	-	.507**	.267**
2. Mental Toughness	20.47	3.83	-	-	.376**
3. Emotional Volatility	24.87	5.94	-	-	-

Note. N=378, SE=Societal Expectations, MT=Mental Toughness, EV=Emotional Volatility, *p<.05, **p<.01.

Table 4.2 depicts that SE demonstrated significant positive correlations with MT (r=0.50, p<0.01) and EV (r=0.26, p<0.01) suggesting that cultural pressures can foster a sense of emotional strength and emotional reactivity.

MT exhibited positive association with EV (r=0.37, p<0.01) indicating that strength to bounce back from difficult situations contribute to emotional dysregulation. This highlights the detrimental effects of helicopter parenting on overall psychological health of generation Z and its positive relationship with emotional dysregulation.

Mediation Analyses through Hays Process

Mediation analysis using PROCESS version 4.1 was conducted to examine the mediating role of Mental Toughness in between Societal Expectations and Emotional volatility.

Table 3

Regression Coefficient, Standard Error, and Model Summary Information for the

					Conseque	ences	EV(Y)	
			MT(M)					
Antecedent		β	SE	P	_	β	SE	P
SE(X)	а	.29	.26	.000	c'	.09	.05	.000
I	-	-	-	-	b	.50	.08	.000
Constant	I	10.2	.92	.000	I	11.33	1.75	.000
	$R^2 = .2$	6			j	$R^2 = .15$		

$$F(1, 376) = 130, p = .000$$

$$F(2, 375) = 32.95, p=.000$$

Note. M= Mediator, SE=Standard Error, SE=Societal Expectations, MT=Mental Toughness, EV=Emotional Volatility, ***p<.001, Beta valve of c = .24

Interpretation

The above table shows that the Baron and Kenny assumptions were fulfilled. So, the findings of the mediation analysis indicate significant total effect of societal expectations on emotional volatility (β = .09, SE= .05, p=.000). Furthermore, the table predicted the significant effect of societal expectations on mental toughness (β = .29, SE= .26, p= .000) and significant effect of mental toughness on emotional volatility (β = .50, SE= .08, p=.000). The findings show partial mediation of mental toughness between the societal expectations and emotional volatility. After controlling mental toughness as mediator, the relationship between societal expectations and emotional volatility is not weaken c' is significant.

Table 4

The Indirect effect of societal expectations on emotional volatility through mental toughness.

Indirect Path	β	SE	Lower Limit	Upper Limit	
SE → MT → EV	.15	.03	.08	.21	

Note. SE=Standard Error, *p<.05, N= 378

Interpretation

The above table shows that the assumption of Hayes Process was fulfilled. The table revealed that the 378 bootstrap sampling taken estimates at 95% Cl were used to see indirect effect. Findings depicted that there was a statistically significant total indirect effect through mental toughness on emotional volatility.

Figure 1

Emerged Model of Mental Toughness as a mediator between Societal Expectations and Emotional volatility.

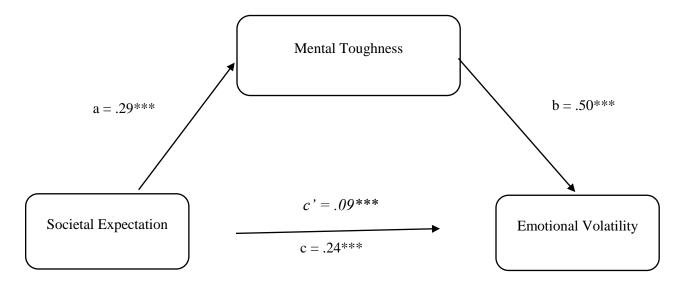


Table 5

Independent Sample t Test showing gender differences on societal expectations, mental toughness and emotional volatility

Variables	Male(12	21)	Female(247)		<u></u>		95% CI			
	M	SD	M	SD	t(375)	P	LL	UL	Cohen's	
									d	
SE	35.70	7.33	34.00	6.07	2.37	.01	.04	.47	.262	
MT	19.85	4.44	20.78	3.47	-2.03	.02	46	02	246	
EV	23.09	6.38	25.72	5.54	-3.89	.001	67	23	453	

Note. M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, CI=Confidence Interval, LL=Lower Limit, UL=Upper Limit, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.

Table 4.4 presents a comparative analysis between male and female across different variables, using means (M), standard deviations (SD), t-test, p-values, confidence intervals (CI) and effect sizes (Cohen's d). There is slightly mean difference of male (M=35.70, SD=7.33) and female (M=34.00, SD=6.07) in societal expectations (SE) and mild difference of male (M=19.85, SD=4.44) and female (M=20.78, SD=3.47) in mental toughness (MT) and emotional volatility show slightly large differences between male (M=23.09, SD=6.38) and female (M=25.72, SD=5.54). These results suggest that gender does not

meaningfully impact the examined dimensions of parenting, societal expectations, resilience and emotional dysregulation.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicate that there is strongly positive relationship between societal expectations, mental toughness and emotional volatility. This agrees with the other differentiating literature that provides effects of societal expectations on resilience, mental challenge, and emotional fluctuations. In the current study, these observations were extended by looking at mental toughness as meditator.

In a research by Pühringer & Wolfmayr (2024) social pressure and stiff competition to get good schools and colleges and prestigious jobs, the parents are under a lot of stress. This may cause micromanaging of the lives of children in efforts of making them succeed. The notion on how helicopter parenting impedes the growth of mental toughness finds a great deal of support in the existing literature. Protecting children against undesirable events and deciding on behalf of children denies children a chance to build problem solving skills, to become resilient, and self-reliant which are part of mental toughness. This is over management that affects the growth of the emotional toughness that assists the children to perform and meet challenges. The pressure to succeed in society may influence the mind to have an impact. This pressure to perform on a regular basis, without having a chance at creating their own coping techniques, may end up making a person mentally tough in case they have to cope with a setback (Caddick & Ryall, 2012). In the present study, a mediating relationship between the societal expectations and emotional volatility in terms of mental toughness was established.

Expectations of society play a critical role in emotional dysregulation because they determine the way people experience, view, and express emotions. Once people internalize strict social conventions like the need to be happy at all times, the prohibition of negative emotions based on cultural or gender expectations or the necessity to succeed no matter what, they might not be able to effectively recognize and experience their emotions. This is likely to result in the problems of emotional suppression and fear of judgment and a loss of access to genuine emotional well-being, which eventually destroys their capabilities to manage emotional intensity, adapt to stress, and control their reactions in a healthy way (Thompson, 2019). This research finding also shows that emotional dysregulation became great when there is an upsurge of societal expectations.

CONCLUSION

Drawing a conclusion, it is possible to reiterate that the relationship between social pressure, mental resilience, and emotional instability is rather complex. The results indicate that there is a highly positive association between these variables indicating that societal expectations might be a major cause of emotional swings and the pressures of society that confront individual strength. This study expands the current literature on mental toughness because of a mediator role, which is the key aspect to define a path through the maze of emotional reactions and resistance to external demands. The consequences of this research are enormous, which suggests that the help of eliminating the pressures of societal expectations would contribute to the establishment of mental toughness and prevention of emotional volatility, as a result of which the emotional development of people would become healthier. These dynamics should be further examined in future to find useful ways to help people learn to develop resilience under the stresses of the modern world.

Limitations

- 1. The dependency on self-reporting has the potential to add bias since the participants might give socially satisfying answers or fail to remember the experiences well.
- 2. The research might fail to take into consideration the contextual impacts which may include cultural influences, socio economic status or external stress that may affect the emotional health and resilience.
- 3. Mental toughness, and emotional volatility measures may influence the results of the study due to the validity and reliability of the applied instruments. There is measurement tool limitation that can cause inaccuracy in assessment.
- 4. In case of study involving immediate emotional reactions, then it may fail to recognize long-term consequences of societal constraints on mental well-being and strength.
- 5. Other factors could have been affecting the relationships explored in the study and could not be controlled, these included personality traits, past trauma, or support systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Carry out longitudinal studies to determine the way interrelation between societal demands, strong mental ability, and unstable emotions changes over a long period of time. It can assist in determining causation and have a long-term outcome.
- 2. Explore these dynamics among various demographic divides, such as distinct cultures, socioeconomic and geographical backgrounds among others to determine how these can be relevant in the influence of society expectation.
- 3. Discuss other possible mediators and moderators (this can include personalities, coping styles, social support, and others) that can mediate such relationship.
- 4. Conduct and carry out intervention studies targeting at increasing mental toughness among children and adolescents. Evaluate the success of such interventions in calming down emotional instability and making one more resilient.
- 5. Employ the qualitative research practices to understand more about the lived experience of people with social pressures. This may make them understand emotional responses and cope in a better way.
- 6. It was proposed that individuals qualified in such fields as psychology, sociology and education should be involved to facilitate a more multidimensional approach to the effects of expectations put on society.

General Implications

- 1. Educators can use the information to create conditions that enhance mental strength and emotional intelligence so that the student is better suited to endure the demands of theirs and society in general.
- 2. Mental health workers can concentrate on the improvement of mental toughness as coping mechanism among persons who experience emotional instability. Resiliency building programs might be especially useful in the reduction of the adverse impact of societal expectations.
- 3. Society should have a better understanding of the consequences of the societal requirements in terms of emotional well-being. Societies are allowed to take advantage of programs of creating less stigma of being vulnerable and encouraging healthy expression of emotion.
- 4. The research leaves ways to the further investigation to the fine flaws of these relations, including the research on other mediators and moderators which might play their part in the relations of resilience, and emotional health.

Clinical Implications

- 1. Events regarding the effects of what the society wants can be incorporated by clinicians in the therapies. The knowledge of these dynamics can assist therapists to design their interventions in response to particular emotional problems experienced by clients.
- 2. Activities (or programs) that focus on improving the issue of mental toughness are capable of creation and application within a clinical setting. An intervention method that can be used to promote resilience and control the emotional response of the people, is cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT).
- 3. Helping clients understand the impact of the demands of society would allow them to understand what causes them to be emotionally unstable. This awareness may be the first step to the development of coping strategies.
- 4. The intervention programs might be aimed at children and adolescents who are at risk of manifesting emotional problems, because of social pressures. These programs are capable of concentrating on the ability of self-efficacy and resilience in early ages.
- 5. The approach that clinicians can make use of to achieve this goal is to partner with educators and community agencies to develop holistic support networks taking into account not only the community but also the higher social factors affecting emotional health.

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